

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KINGST 00841 222207Z

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /056 W

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R 222032Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4162

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY NASSAU

AMEMBASSY PORT

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 0841

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, JM

SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS BEGINS

1. THE CAMPAIGN FOR ELECTIONS TO THE 269 SEATS IN THE 13 PARISH COUNCILS, SCHEDULED TO BE HELD ON MARCH 8, BEGAN YESTERDAY WHEN NOMINATION PAPERS WERE FILED FOR THE 537 CANDIDATES. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE RULING PEOPLES NATIONAL PARTY (PNP) WILL NOMINATE 269 CANDIDATES, THE OPPOSITION JAMAICA LABOUR PARTY (JLP) 264, AND AT LEAST FOUR INDEPENDENTS ARE SEEKING ELECTION. IN FIVE CONTESTS, THE PNP CANDIDATES WERE THE SOLE NOMINEES, AND THUS WERE DECLARED WINNERS, THEREBY LEAVING ACTIVE CONTESTS IN THE REMAINING 264.

2. COMMENT: PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS HAVE USUALLY BEEN DEEMED A KEY INDICATOR OF EMERGING POLITICAL OPINION. ON THIS OCCASION, THE ELECTIONS ARE BEING HELD EARLIER THAN NORMAL -- A FACT WHICH REQUIRED LEGISLATIVE SANCTION -- AND THE LITMUS PAPER QUALITY OF THESE CONTESTS IS SEEN AS A REASON FOR THIS CHANGE. THE PNP WISHES TO CAPITALIZE ON WHAT-EVER BANDWAGON EFFECT MAY REMAIN FROM ITS DECEMBER PARLIAMENTARY VICTORY. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PNP IS
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APPARENTLY ANXIOUS TO GO TO THE POLLS BEFORE (A) THE FULL IMPACT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM OF AUSTERITIES IS FELT AND, CONCEIVABLY, (B) THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANTICIPATED DRIFT INTO SOME GREATER DEGREE OF AUTHORITARIANISM BECOME APPARENT. FOR THE JLP, AN EARLY ELECTION IS LESS ATTRACTIVE THAN WOULD BE ONE IN JUNE (THE ORIGINAL DUE DATE). BUT ONLY marginally SO. THE JLP IS BROKE, AND ITS USUAL BENEFACTORS APPEAR

MORE INTERESTED IN PROTECTING THEMSELVES THAN IN SUPPORTING
A PROVEN LOSER. MOREOVER, THE JLP AS A PARTY IS VERY
DISPIRITED, AND THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO THINK IT WOULD BE
SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER PREPARED TO CONTEST IN JUNE THAN IN
MARCH. A NUMBER OF ITS CANDIDATES IN THE DECEMBER
ELECTION ARE ALREADY SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO EMIGRATE. THE
FOREGOING SUGGESTS THAT ONLY A POPULAR REACTION AGAINST THE
PNP CAN HELP THE JLP.
DORRANCE

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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